

**Green, LindaE**

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**From:** Thomas J. Pyle <tpyle@ierdc.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 2, 2018 3:57 PM  
**To:** FOIA HQ  
**Subject:** FOIA Request for Certain Agency Records  
**Attachments:** IER EPA Tsigotis FOIA.pdf

Dear Public Records Officer:

Attached please find a Freedom of Information Act request for certain agency records. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,  
Thomas Pyle  
President, Institute for Energy Research



1155 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW Suite 900  
Washington DC, 20005

July 31, 2018

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Records FOIA and Privacy Branch  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (2822T)  
Washington, D.C. 20460

**By Email:** [hq.foia@epa.gov](mailto:hq.foia@epa.gov)

RE: Certain Agency records: Peter Tsirigotis

Public Records Officer,

On behalf of the Institute for Energy Research (IER), please consider this request pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552 *et seq.* IER is a non-profit public policy institute organized under section 501(c)3 of the tax code and with research, publication and other media functions, as well as a transparency initiative seeking public records relating to environmental and energy policy and how policymakers use public resources, all of which include broad dissemination of public information obtained under open records and freedom of information laws. IER therefore also requests a fee waiver, on two bases in the alternative, as described below.

Please provide us, within twenty working days,<sup>1</sup> copies of all communications (emails and any text, SMS, WhatsApp or other real time or instant message, hand written notes or voice recordings), and its accompanying information,<sup>2</sup> including also any attachments, which was sent to or from (including also copying, whether as cc: or bcc:) **Peter Tsirigotis**, which also were sent to or from (including also whether as cc: or bcc:) or mention, use, cite, or in any way discuss **a) [j.brad308@gmail.com](mailto:j.brad308@gmail.com), b) [joegoffman@gmail.com](mailto:joegoffman@gmail.com), c) [joegoffman@aol.com](mailto:joegoffman@aol.com), d)** any party at a “@mjbradley.com” email address (be it Michael Bradley, Darlene Ryan, Carrie Jenks, or other), and/or **e) “Clean Energy Group”**.

Records responsive to this request will be dated between January 1, 2018 and the date you process this request.

We request the entire email thread(s) containing any responsive correspondence responsive to this request regardless whether the thread extends outside of the stated time parameter. We seek *records*, specifically, and therefore request EPA not engage in the practice of redacting information it declares “non-responsive”, which is not an enumerated exemption under FOIA.

To further help narrow the population of potentially responsive records and reduce the review required in order to complete processing of this request, **requester does not seek correspondence that merely forwards press clippings, such as news accounts or opinion pieces, if that correspondence has no comment or no substantive comment**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Citizens for Responsible Ethics in Washington v. Federal Election Commission*, 711 F.3d 180, 186 (D.C. Cir. 2013), and discussion, *infra*.

<sup>2</sup> This includes public records, and associated public information, see discussion of Data Delivery Standards, *infra*.

**added by a party** in the thread (an electronic mail message that includes any expression of opinion or viewpoint would be considered as including substantive comment; examples of non-responsive emails would be those forwarding a news report or opinion piece with no comment or only “fyi”, or “interesting”).

These search parameters are sufficiently narrow and precise in their clear delineation for described correspondence over specific dates sent to or from specified EPA employees.

**Our request for fee waiver is in the alternative, first for reasons of public interest, and second, on the basis of IER’s status as a media outlet.**<sup>3</sup> We do not seek the information for a commercial purpose. IER is organized and recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 educational organization. It has an active publishing function as well as a major effort in broadly disseminating public information, particularly as involves the “climate” agenda, energy and environment policy, and the intersection of these matters with activist lobbies. As such, the requester has no commercial interest possible in these records.

The below clearly demonstrates that:

The requested information is of widespread public, media and legislative interest.

Requester is a non-profit classified as such by the Internal Revenue Service.

Requester does not seek these records for a commercial purpose and has no commercial interest possible in these records.

Requester intends to broadly disseminate the information requested.

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<sup>3</sup> See IER’s webpage at <https://instituteeforenergyresearch.org> to view its studies, analysis, YouTube publications and other information relevant to this determination.

To nip an unfortunate, recent practice by the Agency in the bud, please note that the below request includes all of the following expressions of an intention to broadly disseminate responsive records:

IER clearly stated its intention to broadly disseminate the information requested, including but not limited to numerous and credible assurances that Requester intends to broadly disseminate responsive information, including the following but all of which we incorporate by reference here whether repeated below or not (emphases in original, citations omitted but available in the attached, original request)::

\* Requester intends to broadly disseminate the information requested. (p. 3)

\* 2) **Requester intends to broadly disseminate responsive information.** As demonstrated herein requester has both the intent and the ability to convey any information obtained through this request to the public. IER regularly publishes works and it and its experts are regularly cited in newspapers and trade and political publications, and appear on radio and television to discuss their work, and Requester intends to broadly disseminate public information obtained under this FOIA as it has other information relevant to its mission and work.

\* 3) **Disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of specific government operations or activities because the releasable material will be meaningfully informative in relation to the subject matter of the request.** Requester intends to broadly disseminate responsive information. The requested records have an informative value and are “likely to contribute to an understanding of Federal government operations or activities,” and as noted above this issue is of significant and increasing public interest. (p. 17)

\* 4) **The disclosure will contribute to the understanding of the public at large, as opposed to merely that of the requester or a narrow segment of interested persons.**

Regular media coverage of and activist group expressions of concern over the subject of this request — the Agency’s work with interested, outside parties — demonstrate that this is an issue of interest to the general public and not some small subset.

IER is dedicated to and has a documented record of promoting the public interest, advocating sensible policies to protect human health and the environment, broadly disseminating information relevant to the policy issues on which its experts work.

With a demonstrated interest and record in the relevant policy debates and expertise in the subject of energy- and environment-related regulatory policies, IER unquestionably has the “specialized knowledge” and “ability and intention” to disseminate the information requested in the broad manner, and to do so in a manner that contributes to the understanding of the “public at-large.”

**5) The disclosure will contribute “significantly” to public understanding of government operations or activities.** *We repeat and incorporate here by reference the arguments above from the discussion of how disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of specific government operations or activities.*

\* **As such**, requester has stated “with reasonable specificity that its request pertains to operations of the government,” and that it intends to broadly disseminate responsive records. (pp. 18 - 19)

This request is made to inform the public about an issue of great public interest, particularly the widely reported “Resistance” among career staff (including burrowed former political staff) who oppose the current administration’s priorities, as well as the work by such public employees with outside allies in their shared struggle.

**IER first seeks waiver of any fees** under FOIA on that basis. Disclosure of records responsive to this request will contribute “significantly” to public understanding of government operations or activities. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) (“Documents shall be furnished without any charge...if disclosure of the information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute

significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester”); see also *inter alia* 31 C.F.R. Part 1, § 1.7(d)(1).

**In the alternative**, IER requests waiver of its fees on the basis it is a media outlet.

**EPA must address both of these requests for fee waiver in the event it denies one; failure to do so is *prima facie* arbitrary and capricious.**

The provisions for determining whether a requesting party is a representative of the news media, and the “significant public interest” provision, are not mutually exclusive. Again, as IER is a non-commercial requester, it is entitled to liberal construction of the fee waiver standards. 5 U.S.C.S. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii), *Perkins v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*. Alternately and only in the event EPA refuses to waive our fees under the “significant public interest” test, which we would then appeal while requesting EPA proceed with processing on the grounds that we are a media organization, we request a waiver or limitation of processing fees pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii) (“fees shall be limited to reasonable standard charges for document duplication when records are not sought for commercial use and the request is made by.... a representative of the news media...”).

#### **Definition of Information Sought/Delivery Standards**

**Also considering FN 2, *supra*, please consider as responsive entire email “threads”** containing any information responsive to this request, regardless whether any part of that thread falls outside the cited time parameters.

We **do not seek** press clippings, releases or media items sent or received with no, or no substantive, comment elsewhere in the email thread (examples of non-substantive comments

include those adding only “FYI”, or “interesting”). **Therefore, please also treat any such records as non-responsive.**

As this matter involves a significant issue of public interest, please produce responsive information as it becomes available on a rolling basis but consistent with the Act’s prescribed timelines.

In the interests of expediting the search and processing of this Request, **IER is willing to provisionally pay fees up to \$200 in the event EPA denies our fee waiver requests detailed, *infra*, as we appeal such a determination.** Please provide an estimate of anticipated costs in the event that fees for processing this Request will exceed \$200. To keep costs and copying to a minimum please provide copies of all productions to the email used to send this request. Given the nature of the records responsive to this request, all should be in electronic format, and therefore there should be no photocopying costs (see discussion, *infra*).

**We request records on your system**, e.g., its backend logs, and do not seek only those records which survive on an employee’s particular machine or account.

We do not demand your Office produce requested information in any particular form, instead **we request records in their native form, with specific reference to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Data Delivery Standards.**<sup>4</sup> The covered information we seek is electronic information, this includes electronic records, and other public information.

To quote the SEC Data Delivery Standards, “Electronic files must be produced in their native format, i.e. the format in which they are ordinarily used and maintained during the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sec.gov/divisions/enforce/datadeliverystandards.pdf>.



normal course of business. For example, an MS Excel file must be produced as an MS Excel file rather than an image of a spreadsheet. (*Note: An Adobe PDF file is not considered a native file unless the document was initially created as a PDF.*)” (emphases in original).

In many native-format productions, certain public information remains contained in the record (e.g., metadata). Under the same standards, to ensure production of all information requested, if your production will be de-duplicated it is vital that you 1) preserve any unique metadata associated with the duplicate files, for example, custodian name, and, 2) make that unique metadata part of your production.

Native file productions may be produced without load files. However, native file productions must maintain the integrity of the original meta data, and must be produced as they are maintained in the normal course of business and organized by custodian-named file folders. A separate folder should be provided for each custodian.

In the event that necessity requires your Office to produce a PDF file, due to your normal program for redacting certain information and such that native files cannot be produced as they are maintained in the normal course of business, in order to provide all requested information each PDF file should be produced in separate folders named by the custodian and accompanied by a load file to ensure the requested information appropriate for that discrete record is associated with that record. The required fields and format of the data to be provided within the load file can be found in Addendum A of the above-cited SEC Data Standards. All produced PDFs must be text searchable.

**In the context of some government agencies’ demonstrated practice of taking the effort to physically print, then poorly scan electronic mail into low-resolution, non-**

**searchable PDF files**, we note that production of electronic records necessitates no such additional time, effort or other resources, and no photocopying expense. Any such effort as described is most reasonably viewed as an effort to frustrate the requester's use of the public information.

FOIA requests require no demonstration of wrongdoing, and the public interest prong of a FOIA response is the only aspect to which these factors are relevant; we address the public interest in the issue as relates to IER's **requests for fee waiver in the alternative** in detail, *infra*, and respectfully remind EPA that IER is a public interest organization as such that, at most, IER can be charged the costs of copying these records (for electronic records, those costs should be *de minimis*).

#### **EPA Owes Requester a Reasonable Search**

FOIA requires an agency to make a reasonable search of records, judged by the specific facts surrounding each request. *See, e.g., Itrurralde v. Comptroller of the Currency*, 315 F.3d 311, 315 (D.C. Cir. 2003); *Steinberg v. DOJ*, 23 F.3d 548, 551 (D.C. Cir. 1994). In this situation, there should be no difficulty in finding these documents. While the exact location the documents are held is unknown to requester, EPA doubtless knows where to find correspondence of specific, identified employees and is in a position to ascertain whether its employees sent or received correspondence on a particular day.

#### **EPA Must Err on the Side of Disclosure**

It is well-settled that Congress, through FOIA, "sought 'to open agency action to the light of public scrutiny.'" *DOJ v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of Press*, 498 U.S. 749, 772 (1989) (*quoting Dep't of Air Force v. Rose*, 425 U.S. 353, 372 (1976)). The legislative history is replete

with reference to the ““general philosophy of full agency disclosure”” that animates the statute. *Rose*, 425 U.S. at 360 (*quoting* S.Rep. No. 813, 89th Cong., 2nd Sess., 3 (1965)). Accordingly, when an agency withholds requested documents, the burden of proof is placed squarely on the agency, with all doubts resolved in favor of the requester. *See, e.g., Federal Open Mkt. Comm. v. Merrill*, 443 U.S. 340, 352 (1979). This burden applies across scenarios and regardless of whether the agency is claiming an exemption under FOIA in whole or in part. *See, e.g., Tax Analysts*, 492 U.S. 136, 142 n. 3 (1989); *Consumer Fed’n of America v. Dep’t of Agriculture*, 455 F.3d 283, 287 (D.C. Cir. 2006); *Burka*, 87 F.3d 508, 515 (D.C. Cir. 1996). The act is designed to “pierce the veil of administrative secrecy and to open agency action to the light of scrutiny.” *Department of the Air Force v. Rose*, 425 U.S. 352 (1976). It is a transparency-forcing law, consistent with “the basic policy that disclosure, not secrecy, is the dominant objective of the Act.” *Id.*

#### Withholding and Redaction

Please identify and inform us of all responsive or potentially responsive records within the statutorily prescribed time, and the basis of any claimed exemptions or privilege and to which specific responsive or potentially responsive record(s) such objection applies. Pursuant to high-profile and repeated promises and instructions from the previous President and Attorney General we request EPA err on the side of disclosure and not delay production of this information of great public interest through lengthy review processes over which withholdings they may be able to justify. In the unlikely event that EPA claims any records or portions thereof are exempt under any of FOIA’s discretionary exemptions, we request you exercise that discretion and release them consistent with statements by the immediate-past President and

Attorney General, *inter alia*, that “**The old rules said that if there was a defensible argument for not disclosing something to the American people, then it should not be disclosed. That era is now over, starting today**” (President Barack Obama, January 21, 2009), and “**Under the Attorney General’s Guidelines, agencies are encouraged to make discretionary releases. Thus, even if an exemption would apply to a record, discretionary disclosures are encouraged.**” (Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, OIP Guidance, “Creating a ‘New Era of Open Government’”).

Nonetheless, if your office takes the position that any portion of the requested record(s) may be exempt from disclosure, please inform us of the basis of any partial denials or redactions, and provide the rest of the record, all reasonably segregable, non-exempt information, withholding only that information that is properly exempt under one of FOIA’s nine exemptions. *See* 5 U.S.C. §552(b). We remind EPA that it cannot withhold entire documents rather than producing their “factual content” and redacting any information that is legally withheld under FOIA exemptions. As the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals noted, the agency must “describe the factual content of the documents and disclose it or provide an adequate justification for concluding that it is not segregable from the exempt portions of the documents.” *King v. Department of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, at 254 n.28 (D.C. Cir. 1987). **As an example of how entire records should not be withheld when there is reasonably segregable information, we note that at bare minimum basic identifying information (that is “who, what, when” information, e.g., To, From, Date, and typically Subject) is not “deliberative”.**

If it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments and that those nonexempt segments are so dispersed throughout the documents as to make segregation

impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt and how the material is dispersed through the document. See *Mead Data Central v. Department of the Air Force*, 455 F.2d 242, 261. Further, we request that you provide us with an index all such withheld documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), cert. denied, 415 U.S. 977 (1972), with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA” pursuant to *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 959(D.C. Cir. 1979), and “describ[ing] each document or portion thereof withheld, and for each withholding it must discuss the consequences of supplying the sought-after information.” *King v. Department of Justice*, 830 F.2d at 223-24.

**Claims of non-segregability must be made with the same practical detail as required for claims of exemption in a Vaughn index.** If a record is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

Please provide responsive documents in complete form. Any burden on EPA will be lessened if it produces responsive records without redactions and in complete form.

#### **Requests for Fee Waiver in the Alternative**

This extended fee waiver discussion is detailed as a result of our experience of agencies improperly using denial of fee waivers to impose an economic barrier to access, an improper means of delaying or otherwise denying access to public records to groups whose requests are, apparently, unwelcome, including and particularly IER. *It is only relevant if EPA considers denying our fee waiver request.*

**Disclosure would substantially contribute to the public at large’s understanding of governmental operations or activities, on a matter of demonstrable public interest.**

IER's principal request for waiver or reduction of all costs is pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) ("Documents shall be furnished without any charge... if disclosure of the information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester").

IER does not seek these records for a commercial purpose. Requester is organized and recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 educational organization. As such, requester also has no commercial interest possible in these records. If no commercial interest exists, an assessment of that non-existent interest is not required in any balancing test with the public's interest.

As a non-commercial requester, IER is entitled to liberal construction of the fee waiver standards. 5 U.S.C.S. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii), *Perkins v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, 754 F. Supp. 2d 1 (D.D.C. Nov. 30, 2010). The public interest fee waiver provision "is to be liberally construed in favor of waivers for noncommercial requesters." *McClellan Ecological Seepage Situation v. Carlucci*, 835 F. 2d 1284, 2184 (9th Cir. 1987). The Requester need not demonstrate that the records would contain any particular evidence, such as of misconduct. Instead, the question is whether the requested information is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government, period. *See Judicial Watch v. Rosotti*, 326 F. 3d 1309, 1314 (D.C. Cir 2003).

FOIA is aimed in large part at promoting active oversight roles of watchdog public advocacy groups. "The legislative history of the fee waiver provision reveals that it was added to FOIA 'in an attempt to prevent government agencies from using high fees to discourage certain

types of requesters, and requests,’ in particular those from journalists, scholars and nonprofit public interest groups.” *Better Government Ass’n v. State*, 780 F.2d 86, 88-89 (D.C. Cir. 1986) (fee waiver intended to benefit public interest watchdogs), citing to *Ettlinger v. FBI*, 596 F. Supp. 867, 872 (D.Mass. 1984); S. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY, AMENDING the FOIA, S. REP. NO. 854, 93rd Cong., 2d Sess. 11-12 (1974)).<sup>5</sup> “This is in keeping with the statute’s purpose, which is ‘to remove the roadblocks and technicalities which have been used by... agencies to deny waivers.’” *Citizens for Responsibility & Ethics in Washington v. U.S. Dep’t of Educ.*, 593 F. Supp. 261, 268 (D.D.C. 2009), citing to *McClellan Ecological Seepage Situation v. Carlucci*, 835 F.2d 1282, 1284 (9th. Cir. 1987) (quoting 132 Cong. Rec. S16496 (Oct. 15, 1986) (statement of Sen. Leahy)).

Requester’s ability — as well as many nonprofit organizations, educational institutions and news media that will benefit from disclosure — to utilize FOIA depends on its ability to obtain fee waivers. For this reason, “Congress explicitly recognized the importance and the difficulty of access to governmental documents for such typically under-funded organizations and individuals when it enacted the ‘public benefit’ test for FOIA fee waivers”, a waiver provision added to FOIA in an attempt to prevent government agencies from using high fees to discourage certain types of requesters and requests including, most importantly for our

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<sup>5</sup> This was grounded in the recognition that the two plaintiffs in that merged appeal were, like Requester, public interest non-profits that “rely heavily and frequently on FOIA and its fee waiver provision to conduct the investigations that are essential to the performance of certain of their primary institutional activities -- publicizing governmental choices and highlighting possible abuses that otherwise might go undisputed and thus unchallenged. These investigations are the necessary prerequisites to the fundamental publicizing and mobilizing functions of these organizations. Access to information through FOIA is vital to their organizational missions.” *Better Gov’t v. State*. They therefore, like Requester, “routinely make FOIA requests that potentially would not be made absent a fee waiver provision”, requiring the court to consider the “Congressional determination that such constraints should not impede the access to information for appellants such as these.” *Id.*

purposes, nonprofit public interest groups. *Better Government Ass'n v. State*, 780 F.2d 86, 88-89 (D.C. Cir. 1986). Congress made clear its intent that fees should not be utilized to discourage requests or to place obstacles in the way of such disclosure, forbidding the use of fees as “toll gates” on the public access road to information. *Id.*

As the *Better Government* court also recognized, public interest groups employ FOIA for activities “essential to the performance of certain of their primary institutional activities -- publicizing governmental choices and highlighting possible abuses that otherwise might go undisputed and thus unchallenged. These investigations are the necessary prerequisites to the fundamental publicizing and mobilizing functions of these organizations. Access to information through FOIA is vital to their organizational missions.” *Id.* Congress enacted FOIA clearly intending that “fees should not be used for the purpose of discouraging requests for information or as obstacles to disclosure of requested information.” *Ettlinger v. F.B.I.*, 596 F. Supp. 867, 872 (D. Mass. 1984), citing Conf. Comm. Rep., H.R. Rep. No. 1380, 93d Cong., 2d Sess. 8 (1974) at 8. Refusal of fees as a means of withholding records from a FOIA requester constitutes improper withholding. *Id.* at 874.

Therefore, “insofar as... [agency] guidelines and standards in question act to discourage FOIA requests and to impede access to information for precisely those groups Congress intended to aid by the fee waiver provision, they inflict a continuing hardship on the non-profit public interest groups who depend on FOIA to supply their lifeblood -- information.” *Better Gov't v. State* (internal citations omitted). The courts therefore will not permit such application of FOIA requirements that “‘chill’ the ability and willingness of their organizations to engage in activity that is not only voluntary, but that Congress explicitly wished to encourage.” *Id.* As such, agency



implementing regulations may not facially or in practice interpret FOIA's fee waiver provision in a way creating a fee barrier for Requester.

Courts have noted FOIA's legislative history to find that a fee waiver request is likely to pass muster "if the information disclosed is new; supports public oversight of agency operations, including the quality of agency activities and the effects of agency policy or regulations on public health or safety; or, otherwise confirms or clarifies data on past or present operations of the government." *McClellan Ecological Seepage Situation v. Carlucci*, 835 F.2d at 1284-1286 (9th Cir. 1987).

This information request meets that description, for reasons both obvious and specified. As previously discussed, the information sought will provide important insights into the Agency's processing of public interest requests free of the sort of bias that has been the subject of Inspector General inquiry in the recent past. The requested records will provide the public with original source knowledge concerning the above-described issue. The requested records thus clearly concern the operations and activities of government.

**1) The subject matter of the requested records specifically concerns identifiable operations or activities of the government.** Potentially responsive records will provide important insights into the Agency's work with interested, outside parties.

The Department of Justice Freedom of Information Act Guide concedes that this threshold is easily met. There can be no question that it is met here and, for that potentially responsive records unquestionably reflect "identifiable operations or activities of the government" with a connection that is direct and clear, not remote.

2) **Requester intends to broadly disseminate responsive information.** As demonstrated herein requester has both the intent and the ability to convey any information obtained through this request to the public. IER regularly publishes works and it and its experts are regularly cited in newspapers and trade and political publications, and appear on radio and television to discuss their work, and Requester intends to broadly disseminate public information obtained under this FOIA as it has other information relevant to its mission and work.

3) **Disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of specific government operations or activities because the releasable material will be meaningfully informative in relation to the subject matter of the request.** Requester intends to broadly disseminate responsive information. The requested records have an informative value and are “likely to contribute to an understanding of Federal government operations or activities,” and as noted above this issue is of significant and increasing public interest.

However, **the Department of Justice’s Freedom of Information Act Guide makes it clear that, in the DoJ’s view, the “likely to contribute” determination hinges in substantial part on whether the requested documents provide information that is not already in the public domain.** It cannot be denied that, to the extent the requested information is available to any parties, it appears likely that this is information held only by EPA, is therefore clear that the requested records are “likely to contribute” to an understanding of your agency’s decisions because they are not otherwise accessible other than through a FOIA request.

Thus, disclosure and dissemination of this information will facilitate meaningful public participation in the policy debate, therefore fulfilling the requirement that the documents requested be “meaningfully informative” and “likely to contribute” to an understanding of

your agency's dealings with interested parties outside the agency and interested -- but not formally involved -- employees who may nonetheless be having an impact on the federal permitting process, state and local processes and/or activism on the issue.

**4) The disclosure will contribute to the understanding of the public at large, as opposed to merely that of the requester or a narrow segment of interested persons.**

Regular media coverage of and activist group expressions of concern over the subject of this request — the Agency's work with interested, outside parties — demonstrate that this is an issue of interest to the general public and not some small subset.

IER is dedicated to and has a documented record of promoting the public interest, advocating sensible policies to protect human health and the environment, broadly disseminating information relevant to the policy issues on which its experts work.

With a demonstrated interest and record in the relevant policy debates and expertise in the subject of energy- and environment-related regulatory policies, IER unquestionably has the “specialized knowledge” and “ability and intention” to disseminate the information requested in the broad manner, and to do so in a manner that contributes to the understanding of the “public at-large.”

**5) The disclosure will contribute “significantly” to public understanding of government operations or activities. *We repeat and incorporate here by reference the arguments above from the discussion of how disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of specific government operations or activities.***

Only by the EPA releasing this information will public interest groups such as Requester, other media, and the public at large see these terms first hand and draw their own conclusions

concerning the Agency's work with interested, outside parties. The significance of this to the public understanding is vast, as it will allow the public to examine the details of these interactions to ascertain the degree of control outside actors might have over agency deliberations. Because IER has no commercial interests of any kind, disclosure can only result in serving the needs of the public interest.

**As such**, requester has stated "with reasonable specificity that its request pertains to operations of the government," and that it intends to broadly disseminate responsive records. "[T]he informative value of a request depends not on there being certainty of what the documents will reveal, but rather on the requesting party having explained with reasonable specificity how those documents would increase public knowledge of the functions of government." *Citizens for Responsibility & Ethics in Washington v. U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Services*, 481 F. Supp. 2d 99, 107-109 (D.D.C. 2006). We note that federal agencies regularly waive fees for substantial productions arising from requests expressing the same intention using the same language as used in the instant request.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., no fees required by other agencies for processing often substantial numbers of records on the same or nearly the same but less robust waiver-request language include: **DoI** OS-2012-00113, OS-2012-00124, OS-2012-00172, FWS-2012-00380, BLM-2014-00004, BLM-2012-016, BLM: EFTS 2012-00264, CASO 2012-00278, NVSO 2012-00277; **NOAA** 2013-001089, 2013-000297, 2013-000298, 2010-0199, and "Peterson-Stocker letter" FOIA (August 6, 2012 request, no tracking number assigned, records produced); **DoL** (689053, 689056, 691856 (all from 2012)); **FERC** 14-10; **DoE** HQ-2010-01442-F, 2010-00825-F, HQ-2011-01846, HQ-2012-00351-F, HQ-2014-00161-F, HQ-2010-0096-F, GO-09-060, GO-12-185, HQ-2012-00707-F; **NSF** (10-141); **OSTP** 12-21, 12-43, 12-45, 14-02.; **EPA** HQ-2013-000606, HQ-FOI-01087-12, HQ-2013-001343, R6-2013-00361, R6-2013-00362, R6-2013-00363, HQ-FOI-01312-10, R9-2013-007631, HQ-FOI-01268-12, HQ-FOI-01269, HQ-FOI-01270-12, HQ-2014-006434. These latter examples involve EPA either waiving fees, not addressing the fee issue, or denying fee waiver but dropping that posture when requester sued.

The key to “media” fee waiver is whether a group publishes, as IER most surely does. *See supra*. In *National Security Archive v. Department of Defense*, 880 F.2d 1381 (D.C. Cir. 1989), the D.C. Circuit wrote:

The relevant legislative history is simple to state: because one of the purposes of FIRA is to encourage the dissemination of information in Government files, as Senator Leahy (a sponsor) said: “It is critical that the phrase ‘representative of the news media’ be broadly interpreted if the act is to work as expected.... If fact, *any person or organization which regularly publishes or disseminates information to the public ... should qualify for waivers as a ‘representative of the news media.’*”

*Id.* at 1385-86 (emphasis in original).

As the court in *Electronic Privacy Information Center v. Department of Defense*, 241 F. Supp. 2d 5 (D.D.C. 2003) noted, this test is met not only by outlets in the business of publishing such as newspapers; instead, citing to the *National Security Archives* court, it noted one key fact is determinative, the “*plan to act, in essence, as a publisher*, both in print and other media.” *EPIC v. DOD*, 241 F.Supp.2d at 10 (*emphases added*). “In short, the court of appeals in *National Security Archive* held that ‘[a] representative of the news media is, in essence, a person or entity that gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw material into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience.’” *Id.* at 11. *See also, Media Access Project v. FCC*, 883 F.2d 1063, 1065 (D.C. Cir. 1989).

For these reasons, requester qualifies as a “representative[] of the news media” under the statutory definition, because it routinely gathers information of interest to the public, uses editorial skills to turn it into distinct work, and distributes that work to the public. *See EPIC v. Dep’t of Defense*, 241 F. Supp. 2d 5 (D.D.C. 2003)(non-profit organization that gathered information and published it in newsletters and otherwise for general distribution qualified as

representative of news media for purpose of limiting fees). Courts have reaffirmed that non-profit requesters who are not traditional news media outlets can qualify as representatives of the new media for purposes of the FOIA, particularly after the 2007 amendments to FOIA. *See ACLU of Washington v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, No. C09-0642RSL, 2011, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 26047 at \*32 (W.D. Wash. Mar. 10, 2011). *See also Serv. Women's Action Network v. DOD*, 2012 U.S. Dist. Lexis 45292 (D. Conn., Mar. 30, 2012).

Accordingly, any fees charged must be limited to duplication costs. The records requested are available electronically and are requested in electronic format, so there should be no costs.

### **Conclusion**

We expect the EPA to release within the statutory period of time all responsive records, withholding only segregable portions of any that might contain properly exempt information, and to provide information that may be withheld under FOIA's discretionary provisions, and otherwise proceed with a bias toward disclosure, consistent with the law's clear intent, judicial precedent affirming this bias, and President Obama's directive to all federal agencies on January 26, 2009. Memo to the Heads of Exec. Offices and Agencies, Freedom of Information Act, 74 Fed. Reg. 4683 (Jan. 26, 2009) ("The Freedom of Information Act should be administered with a clear presumption: in the face of doubt, openness prevails. The Government should not keep information confidential merely because public officials might be embarrassed by disclosure, or because of speculative or abstract fears.").

**We expect all aspects of this request including the search for responsive records be processed free from conflict of interest (i.e., the Agency should not ask the party/parties whose correspondence is at issue in the request what they might have that is responsive).**

We request the EPA to provide particularized assurance that it is reviewing some quantity of records with an eye toward production on some estimated schedule, so as to establish some reasonable belief that it is processing our request. 5 U.S.C.A. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i); see also *CREW v. FEC*. The EPA must at least inform us of the scope of potentially responsive records, including the scope of the records it plans to produce and the scope of documents that it plans to withhold under any FOIA exemptions; FOIA specifically requires the EPA to immediately notify IER with a particularized and substantive determination, and of its determination and its reasoning, as well as IER's right to appeal; further, FOIA's unusual circumstances safety valve to extend time to make a determination, and its exceptional circumstances safety valve providing additional time for a diligent agency to complete its review of records, indicate that responsive documents must be collected, examined, and reviewed in order to constitute a determination. See *Citizens for Responsible Ethics in Washington v. Federal Election Commission*, 711 F.3d 180, 186 (D.C. Cir. 2013). See also, *Muttitt v. U.S. Central Command*, 813 F. Supp. 2d 221; 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 110396 at \*14 (D.D.C. Sept. 28, 2011)(addressing "the statutory requirement that [agencies] provide estimated dates of completion").

We request a rolling production of records, such that the agency furnishes records to my attention as soon as they are identified, preferably electronically, but as needed then to my attention, at the address below. We inform the EPA of our intention to protect our appellate

rights on this matter at the earliest date should the EPA not comply with FOIA per, *e.g.*, *CREW v. Fed. Election Comm'n*, 711 F.3d 180 (D.C. Cir. 2013).

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



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